

# The Christian News-Letter

Edited by  
J. H. OLDHAM

November 29th, 1944

DEAR MEMBER,

Two important visitors to this country during the past month have been Dr. Visser 't Hooft, Secretary of the World Council of Churches, and Dr. Marc Boegner, President of the Federation of Protestant Churches in France. They are warmly welcome here, both for their own sakes as honoured guests and in the hope that they are the first of many who will renew the long interrupted contacts between ourselves and fellow Christians on the Continent.

## THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

The first object of these visits has been to discuss the future of the World Council of Churches. The deaths of William Temple and of William Paton have deprived the Council in its difficult initial stages of its president and one of its secretaries. In so far as movements are embodied in persons and the vision which they see, these losses are grievous ; but it is God's way to confront us in the demands of the moment and to lead us forward by way of practical tasks to be done. Can we and the Churches of the United States, out of our comparative richness, see to it that opportunities which may come to the Churches of Europe to bear a part in restoring hope and stability to a chaotic world are not lost because the physical resources of those Churches are diminished or exhausted ? That is the immediate task.

Beyond the question of giving material aid lies that of strengthening the forces of the Churches by a sharing of experience, and by turning their diversity into a source of strength. In this country—we must face the fact—not a few local experiments in co-operation between Churches have broken down because belief in what can be achieved by setting up committees and machinery has been too optimistic. Good-will has been lost by the tendency of some to over-simplify the problem into one of fraternisation at a superficial level. Failures of this kind, and successes where they have been achieved, remind us that common action and growing understanding are costly and sacrificial. Sudden glimpses of priceless opportunities of Christian witness, irrecoverably lost because the Church was divided, recall us to renewed persistence at a deeper level.

When we come to relations between Churches on a world scale none of our difficulties are diminished. World Councils of Churches are no freer from the possibly fatal results of unwieldiness and division than world councils of anything else. We sometimes easily assume that Germans, Russians and Indians by being "one in Christ Jesus" are

*the same*, and that therefore communication between Christians is easy and full understanding not impossible. It might be easy to produce a group of Christian internationalists and interdenominationalists who enter fully into the experience of others, but in the end forfeit their solidarity with the Church, nation and communion from which they came. A deracinated ecumenical clique would have no enduring life. But if we lay aside the easy (and in fact impossible) alternative of depriving individual Churches of all that makes them themselves in order to draw them together, then we have to realize that all Churches have pasts, and cultures, and national traditions, and that the Christians who form these Churches are Americans and Japanese, capitalists and trade unionists, almost infinitely diverse in matters of culture, taste, thought forms, language and social background. Only in moribund Churches are the tensions of the world not found and felt. To shut these tensions out of any international Christian gathering is to let in the devil of unreality, which is present at so many of our godly discussions.

"Could the German I prayed and talked with in the Black Forest shoot me on the battlefield?" We know that the blunt answer is "Yes." We should be living in a fool's paradise if we thought that all the bitter suffering of the past five years would not colour the relationships within the ecumenical movement of Germans and French, Russians and Finns, or that we can bring reconciliation by opening an office and establishing a secretariat.

Two facts stand out in the present situation—one is the desperate spiritual need of the world, which the Church faces with scattered, divided and humanly speaking totally inadequate resources. The other is that in these years of agony the gifts of Christ's love, the *charismata*, have been shed in rich and varied measure on this and that company of his faithful people. The World Council of Churches only has meaning if we make it the means of expressing an overmastering desire to meet this need and share these gifts.

## THE DUTCH CHURCH

A Church which has both suffered and triumphed is the Reformed Church of Holland. It had a glorious part in the formation of Holland as a free country; but it had grown, like many others, a little complaisant, conservative and lacking in fire. The events of the invasion were unexpected and devastating. The policy of the occupying powers was to push the Church into a backwater, cut it off from all influence upon public events and there leave it to die. When a Church suffers direct attack it is the clergy who as its official spokesmen bear the brunt. When, as in Holland, the attack is indirect it is the Christian layman who meets the challenge to his Christian faith in his secular vocation, and normally meets it alone. Among the first laymen to resist was a high official of one of the ministries at the Hague. Calling together his associates in the ministry he announced that he had been required to inquire of every person applying for a staff nomination whether he had Jewish ancestry. "As a confessing Christian and as a Dutchman," he said, "I cannot ask anyone this question. It is against the deepest foundations of our

faith in Jesus Christ, in whom God reveals himself to all men and before whom all men are equal, to prefer one man to another because he belongs to a certain race or a certain nationality." He closed his speech of resignation from his office by reading the twenty-third psalm. His words carried him to a concentration camp, but they bore fruit in the Church. There followed a steadily increasing volume of resistance to the action of the occupying powers and a steady clarification of the stand which Christians felt themselves impelled at great cost to take.<sup>1</sup>

The Church has been quickened into new life. The laity have come into a new prominence as leaders. But for the invasion there would be taking place in January the first national synod of the Church since that of Dordrecht in 1619. Its influence in national life has been greatly enhanced, and here again laymen have taken a leading part. With a few pastors they have formed commissions on the reconstruction of the national life. There are bound to be repercussions in politics, for three of the important political parties in Holland are Christian parties. They are moving from a cautiously conservative position to a closer alignment with progressive forces, particularly the Social Democrats. In addition Christians have played their part in the underground movement: one of the chief illicit publications is a Christian paper which frequently reproduces matter from the Christian News-Letter.

### MADELEINE BAROT

The name of Madeleine Barot is probably already known to a few in this country. She was a Student Christian Movement secretary in France, and vice-chairman of the World Conference of Christian Youth held at Amsterdam in July 1939. She had a brilliant academic record and was librarian of the Palais Farnèse, the French Institute in Rome. In 1940 thousands of Jewish and French refugees were herded into huge internment camps in Vichy France. Madeleine Barot gave herself to working among these people in camps at Gurs and Rivesaltes, to which she brought groups of students who lived the hard camp life with the refugees. At one time the only chairs and the only books were those which she provided, and for an hour or two the misery of hunger and discomfort could be forgotten in reading, discussion and worship. When the deportation of Jewish refugees to Poland began, Madeleine Barot organized small parties of students who acted as guides to smuggle threatened Jews over the mountains into Switzerland. The risks were great, and some died on the journey; but many reached safety. She herself laboured unremittingly to secure reprieves. Sometimes she managed to haul men and women from the trains at points on the route.

The invasion and the rising of the Maquis brought this work to an end: but there are now over 8,000 collaborationists in F.F.I. prisons and in a great camp at Drancy outside Paris. "Did you or did you not collaborate?" This is black or white, death or life, in France. Madeleine Barot is now in Drancy camp. The collaborationists are not starving, but these bankers, politicians, industrialists and the like who believed that society could not go on without them have suddenly

<sup>1</sup> *The Struggle of the Dutch Church*, with an introduction by Dr. Visser 't Hooft, gives all the relevant documents. S.C.M. Press. 2s. 6d.

found themselves outside the framework of society, alone with their thoughts and without their telephones. They are spiritually needy people, to whom Madeleine Barot has brought a pastoral ministry, Christian worship and books to meet their need.

We in this country are near enough to Europe to understand, with the exercise of our imaginations, some at least of the sufferings and triumphs of fellow Christians on the Continent. Nevertheless, it is fatally easy for us to sit in our armchairs listening to stories of Christian courage over the radio or reading them in the religious press, and to end by being nothing more than well informed. Can we catch their fire? For our contribution to the ecumenical movement and to the whole cause of Christ's Kingdom does not depend on how much we know, but on what use we make of that knowledge and how urgently we turn from what we hear to tackling our own problems with enlarged vision and stronger will.

## THE SUPPLEMENT

We have permission to present as a Supplement the concluding part (slightly abbreviated) of an address given at a Church gathering in Switzerland in the summer of this year by the eminent Swiss theologian Dr. Karl Barth. The address, of which we have room to give only about a fifth, is published under the title *Verheissung und Verantwortung der christlichen Gemeinde im heutigen Zeitgeschehen*. It will be noticed that Dr. Barth is not dealing with the political problem of the treatment of Germany, but with the personal attitudes and spiritual insights, by the presence or absence of which our judgments of public questions are indirectly, sometimes imperceptibly, but it may be decisively, influenced.

Yours sincerely,

*Dr. Deacon*

P.S.—May we remind you that, if you wish to send a gift subscription to the News-Letter to any of your friends at Christmas, orders should reach this office by **December 6th**, as the next number is the last one to be published before Christmas.

# THE CHRISTIAN WITNESS TO-DAY

By KARL BARTH

If I see rightly, there are three things to which the Christian Church has a special responsibility to bear witness in the contemporary situation.

## THE RULE OF GOD

The first is simply and generally the *Kingdom of God*. That is what the world does not know—that God, that is to say, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the Father of Jesus Christ, *rules*. How can the Christian Church, the community of the seeing and the living, which already knows the truth in advance and from a direct source—how can it be silent about the fact that in reality and truth God rules? That is what it is commissioned to say—to confess and proclaim that God rules even this wicked world and is the Lord, Judge, Saviour and Protector even of evil men. The world is suffering from its ignorance of that fact. We are all suffering from ignorance of it. We keep on asking ourselves over and over again, Does God really rule? We go on living as though he did not rule.

It is not we Christians who establish God's rule. He rules in reality quite apart from us. Just as little can we bring about the coming of his kingdom, so that his rule is made manifest in glory. But what we can and must do is to bear witness that he *does* rule and *will* set up his kingdom. We can, and must, bear witness to the world of that certainty and this hope.

## THE LEGITIMATE STATE

The second is a lesser matter, but by no means unimportant. The Christian Church owes it to-day to its Lord and to the world to bear witness to the divine beneficent appointment and divine necessity of the legitimate and free temporal *State*. On the threshold of contemporary events we see the warrior State claiming divine prerogatives and treating Christ the King and his people only as enemies. Great and terrible in this enmity, it becomes purely a power State, and now, as a result of this enmity, faces the prospect of miserable collapse. But we see also, fortunately, other States, admittedly far from perfect, but none the less with all their imperfections legitimate and free, which have set up a dyke against the deluge. We have cause to be thankful that in the history of our time an area of order survives in the temporal, human sphere, and has proved its power to resist. The Christian Church knows to whom all power has been given in heaven and on earth. Just for that reason it knows how to distinguish between true and false power, between legitimate and illegitimate temporal power, between authority ordained by God and an authority arbitrarily fabricated and enthroned by man. It is thankful, therefore, for all true, legitimate, divinely ordained power and authority which set

limits to inhumanity and make room for a genuinely human existence. True politics, according to the clear word of the Apostle Paul (Romans 13. 4), is also the service of God.

The maintenance and development of the legitimate and free State is something which can never and nowhere be taken for granted. The Christian Church cannot be indifferent in this matter. It has far too often in this sphere allowed itself to be hesitant and silent when it should have spoken. The whole great misfortune in Germany might never have occurred if the Christian Church in that country had not through centuries acquired the habit of remaining silent about the true nature of temporal power and authority, about justice and freedom, when it ought to have borne witness and spoken boldly.

## THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

Thirdly, in the situation we are facing to-day the Christian Church has a special responsibility to make sure that there is no concealment, but a bold proclamation, of the Word in which the deepest secret of the Kingdom of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ is uttered—the word of the *forgiveness of sins*. The Christian Church lives by the fact that it is comforted, sustained and encouraged by Jesus Christ, not because Christians have deserved such grace, but although and because they have not deserved it. They live by the grace of God. It is sinful men that he will not allow to fall from his grasp. It is the death of the sinner that he does not will, but rather that he should turn and live. It is with a view to justifying the unrighteous that God executes his judgments. The Christian Church knows that the reins of government are in the hands of this *gracious* God. That that is the truth, and that the Church knows it, is what now more than ever the Church must make visible.

Now more than ever! It is a fact that in the contemporary situation there has been an excess and enormity of sin against God, and consequently also between man and man. How great an ocean of intelligible anger and hatred has accumulated in these years we shall fully see for the first time in the hour in which everywhere it will burst its banks and break out in fearful vengeance. Even where the action takes place not in disorder, but by orderly process, heavy reparations will be unavoidable for the assertion and re-establishment of order. It is entirely right, as was recently said in a Swiss newspaper, that Christians must be careful to avoid speaking too hastily and simply of the equal guilt of all and sundry, and that there are in the present situation real differences of responsibility to be taken into account and not swept out of the world by a universal forgiveness and toleration.

All this cannot and must not, however, prevent the Christian Church from believing and confessing that the God who sits in government is the *gracious* God, the God who forgives sins. This faith and this confession has nothing to do with irresponsible goodwill or indifference towards evil or towards evil men.

Certainly it very rarely happens that a nation puts itself so unequivocally in the wrong against all other nations as the German nation has done in these years. But it is just this unequivocal character

of the situation that ought to make us Christians pause. It is precisely in its conflict with the *gracious God* that the German nation has put itself so grievously in the wrong in the sphere of human relations and now come so overwhelmingly to grief. It is just in its helplessness in relation to God that it is suffering now, and will have to suffer still more. That it is the God that forgives sins who will not allow himself to be mocked, that it is the throne of his mercifulness that stands firm against all excesses of human pride—that is what the German nation must now experience in great bitterness. And what it must also learn is that the meaning of its present experience is precisely this: its encounter with the gracious God, whom it wanted to reject, but who manifestly will not allow himself to be rejected. That is what the German people have now to learn.

What consequence has this fact for the rest of us? Most assuredly this, if we are Christians, and as such know that we live by the grace of God alone, that we must seriously reckon with the possibility that the last may become the first. And, therefore, most certainly this also, that to the calamity which is now beginning to recoil overwhelmingly on the heads of these last, from whom it originated, we can, in no circumstances, add our own judgment of condemnation. It was not possible, and would not have been right for us, in these past years to have stood on their side. It is not possible, and would not be right now, to take a middle position of “neutrality” between them and others. As Christians, most emphatically not. It was our duty in our own place to protest against and resist the excesses which were committed in the name of the German people and not without their consent and co-operation. But in so far as we did that rightly, we did it not merely *against* the German people, but also *for* them and in their own true interest. And when this resistance has become no longer necessary, because the German State lies prostrate and deprived of power to do further harm, it can no longer be our affair to judge where God has judged.

The German people is in the hand of *God*; in the stern hand of a *gracious God*. For that reason it is for us, who had to resist and did resist, to hold our hand.

And that is what we have got to say to the Germans when we are again able to talk with them. We cannot take away from them their responsibility and its bitter consequences. We must beg them not to disavow that responsibility nor seek to evade its consequences. But we must not keep silence about the fact that the great promise of “Jesus Christ, the propitiation for our sins,” is addressed to them, and very specially to them, who have at this time so recklessly and violently fought against it—to every man of German race, even to that unhappy man with whose name the concentrated horrors of these years have been inseparably associated.

And in doing that, it will be necessary for us not to overlook the beam in our own eye. Much rather we shall acknowledge to our German brethren that our own sins are not hidden from us. We must confess

along with them that we know that for us, as well as for them, the only help and hope is that the word of forgiveness should be spoken to us in a wholly new way and that only through this word can we be justified.

Together we must pray the Lord's Prayer. The petition, Give us this day our daily bread, will everywhere be needed after this war. But still more needed will be the petition that follows it, Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And not least, the last petition, Lead us not into temptation—into new, more severe temptation—but deliver us from evil. Everything will depend on all that being said and prayed not *against* but *for*—not condescendingly from above, but in full readiness for fellowship *with*—those from whom for the sake of truth we have had for so long to separate ourselves.

That that should really come about is the responsibility of the Christian Church in all countries. The world will inevitably rush headlong from one form of chaos to another unless the transition can be made to such a disposition and attitude—unless mingled with all the severe and stern things that must be said and done for the restoration of order, there sounds loud and clear the word of the forgiveness of sins. The Christian Church, and it alone, knows this word, and can and dare utter it. This utterance *must* be forthcoming. Woe to the Church if it fails in this responsibility, if it knows to-day only how to bind and not to loose, only to blame and chide and not to comfort and help, only to retain sins and not to forgive them, to preach only the law and not the Gospel. The erring and bewildered of our time, and not less the callous and the lost—let us not forget that we too are among them—need above all to be told of God's grace. We have all sinned against it. To it we must all allow ourselves to be recalled. Without this even the holy law of God cannot, and will not, regain its authority.

The Christian Church is responsible for making this recall to grace a reality. It is a heavy responsibility—perhaps to-day the heaviest of all that the Church has to carry. But it must be accepted. The gospel of the present and coming Kingdom of God cannot have power, the gospel of the legitimate and free State cannot bring health, the Christian Church cannot be the Christian Church, unless from the centre of its life it is boldly proclaimed, more clearly than ever before, that it is the God of patience and comfort (Romans 15. 5) who wields the sceptre. Perhaps, after all, this responsibility is not so heavy as we feared, because it is ultimately a *joyful* thing to be able in the actual situation of to-day to announce "good tidings of great joy."

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Subscriptions—12s. 6d. (\$3.00 in U.S.A. and Canada) for one year. 6s. 6d. for six months (Great Britain and Ireland only). Single copies 6d.: reduction for quantities.

Folders—New format, holding one year's supply, 3s. post free.

*All communications and subscriptions should be sent to—*  
THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER, 19 DEAN'S YARD, WESTMINSTER, LONDON, S.W. 1.

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Published by Dr. J. H. Oldham for the Christian Frontier Council, and printed in Great Britain by the Church Army Press, Cowley, Oxford.